

Wise Sanitarium No. 1 (A.C. Wellons Building)
Third building from the east on the block
between Bond and Hudson streets
Plains
Sumter County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2216

HABS
GA,
131-PLAIN,
21-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WISE SANITARIUM No. 1
(A.C. Wellons Building)

HABS No. GA-2216

HABS
GA,
131-PLAIN
21-

- Location: Third building from the east on the Main Street business block between Bond and Hudson streets, Plains, Sumter County, Georgia.
- USGS Plains Georgia Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: Zone 16, E 746200 N 3546900.
- Present Owner: East side: Gloria Carter Spann; west side: Frank and Albert Williams.
- Present Occupant: The east portion serves as an appliance-repair shop; the west is vacant and used for storage.
- Significance: The buildings in this business block were erected between 1896-1916 as brick was used to gradually replace original wood-frame structures. Situated southwest of the Plains Depot, this block was the business hub for the region before the Depression. This building was constructed to house the Wise Hospital, founded by doctors well-known throughout the state. In the 1940s, Jimmy Carter's father used the east portion of the building for his peanut warehouse business.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1916. February 13, 1916, article in The Americus Daily Times Recorder describes the building as "about all but completed."¹
2. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a chain of title to the land on which the building stands. Deeds are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.
 - 1913 Deed July 19, 1913, recorded November 11, 1925, Deed Book 5, page 15. D.C. Hudson sold a lot 30' x 100' to A.C. Wellons. (west half of lot)
 - 1915 Deed October 11, 1915, Deed Book PP, page 40. J.C. Logan sold the lot on which the east half of the building was constructed to A.C. Wellons.
 - 1938 Deed August 10, 1938, recorded August 10, 1938, Deed Book 22, page 164. Anna B. Wellons and Alerus B. Wellons sold a 56' x

¹ Americus Daily Times Recorder, February 13, 1916.

100' lot to F.F. Timmerman and O.A. Williams for \$1,000.

- 1941 Deed January 10, 1941, recorded January 10, 1941, Deed Book 26, pages 12-13. Ida Lee Timmerman sold her interest in the building to O.A. Williams.
- 1943 Deed July 6, 1943, recorded July 14, 1943, Deed Book 27, page 541. O.A. Williams sold a building with 26'-5" fronting on Main Street (east part) to James Earl Carter for \$600.
- 1959 Deed October 10, 1959, recorded December 22, 1959, Deed Book 62, page 55. M & M Cash Store sold a building with 29'-7" fronting on Main Street to O.A. Williams and G.F. Williams.

- 3. Builder: A.C. Wellons. Augustus C. Wellons (1854-1932) served as pastor of the Plains Baptist Church from 1892-93. He also constructed at least four homes in Plains and the Plains Baptist Church. His son, Ernest, carried on the trade in Plains after his father's death.
- 4. Original plans and construction: None have been located.
- 5. Alterations and additions: A fire around 1920 gutted the second story, although the first floor was unharmed. A sloped roof was added over the gutted section, cutting off much of the usable area. When Williams purchased the building, he refurbished the front area of the second floor over the west half of the building; rewiring, painting over charred areas and adding linoleum-tile floors and dropped, acoustical tile ceilings. The first floor of the west side was altered in 1976 when it became the Back Porch Cafe. A decorative divider was erected in the center of the room and a partitioned kitchen and restroom were placed in the back. Acoustical ceilings were also added on the first floor of the east portion.

B. Historical context: According to the 1916 article "Wellons Building Store at Plains," in the Americus Daily Times Recorder²:

"It is said the building was first intended for a hotel, but (sic) has been changed for Wise's sanatorium and that when ready for occupancy will be used for this purpose. . . The Wellons Building will have eighteen or more rooms on the second floor and when finished will not only be one of the prettiest in the thriving little city of Plains, but would be a credit to a much larger city."

The Wise Hospital did occupy the second floor of the building until it burned, just before the completion of the new Wise Sanitarium on Hospital Street (see

² Americus Daily Times Recorder, February 13, 1916.

HABS No. GA-2213). Ruth Godwin recalled having her first son at this hospital, which she said had several nurses, a kitchen, and a dining room. She also remembers sitting on a porch overlooking Main Street during her recovery. A single door is extant in the seventh bay of the second floor of the front facade corroborating the existence of such a porch.

The store fronts beneath the hospital housed various businesses over the years. The east half served for a time as the dentist office of Seymour Evans,³ and was also a barber shop, a pharmacy and a grocery store. In 1934, James Earl Carter, Jimmy Carter's father, rented the space and began his peanut warehouse business, finally purchasing the east portion in 1943. When Jimmy Carter returned to Plains in 1953 to run the business, he also used this space for storage and recalls practicing one of his favorite hobbies, woodworking, in the back of the store on slow days. W.L. Thomas ran an insurance agency in a booth in the west portion of the east section. Carter used the building as his campaign headquarters when he ran for senator and governor. The sign on the second story, painted during his gubernatorial campaign by Plains resident, Jerry Roberts, originally said "Plains Georgia, Home of Jimmy Carter, Our Next Governor." The bottom line was soon changed to "Governor of Georgia," then to "Our Next President," and finally to "Our 39th President." During the 1976 presidential campaign, press offices were located in the back of the building.

Gloria Carter Spann inherited the building from the family estate and now rents the space to an appliance-repair company.

The west half has also had a variety of tenants. In 1976, when Plains became a tourist mecca, the Back Porch Cafe was opened by Angie Stevens. The space was renovated to serve as a restaurant and Rosalynn Carter presided over opening ceremonies for the establishment August 5, 1976. After the restaurant closed, Frances Gift Shop briefly occupied the space in the 1980s. The space is now used for storage.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The last and largest building constructed on the block, the A.C. Wellons Building was also the most architecturally complex, with a fully finished upstairs space and decorative tile floors and pressed-tin ceilings in the first-floor store areas.
2. Condition of fabric: The first floor and exterior are in good condition. The west end of the second story, which has been renovated, is very good but the east half, which has been neglected since the fire, is in poor condition.

³ Walters, 1985, p. 46.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This two-story, rectangular building is approximately 55' x 100'. The facade has seven bays on the second floor while two storefronts share the first story. The east storefront is 30'-10" with four bays, the west storefront is 24'-0" with three bays.

2. Foundations: Brick.

3. Walls: Brick. The north/front facade of the east storefront is clad with white brick laid in running bond that is painted green. The first three bays are recessed, and the walls of the recessed area are concrete painted green. The west storefront is clad with running-bond brick painted gray. The three bays of this storefront are divided by four chamfered wood piers. The center bay with the largely glazed door is recessed and flanked by canted walls. A paneled kick plate runs the length of the storefront, with two panels in the first and third bays under the display windows, and one panel in each of the canted walls.

On the second story, the brick exterior is painted white with three recessed lozenge-shaped brick panels painted green. A large plywood sign covers the four east bays of front fenestration. It reads "Plains Georgia, home of Jimmy Carter, our 39th President."

The east and west facades are shared with the two adjacent structures. The back wall is seven-course American bond. A board between the third and fourth bay of the rear facade reveals the division of the first floor into two store areas.

4. Structural system, framing: Approximately 13" thick load-bearing brick.
5. Porches: A one-story corrugated-metal shed roof covers the sidewalk in front of the building supported on wood piers atop battered concrete pedestals. A second-story balcony was removed in the 1920s.
6. Chimneys: An exterior brick chimney on the east wall served a fireplace on the second story. A stove on the first story was later added and connected to the flue.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front/north facade has four doorways. The entrance to the east storefront consists of double doors with fixed display glazing, single wood panels beneath, and double wood and screen doors painted green. Between the two storefront units is a single two-panel, two-light door leading to

the second floor. A row of projecting headers forms an arch over this entry. The west storefront entry is centered, recessed and flanked by canted display-window walls. The recessed double doors have two lights each with panels matching those in the kickplate. The fourth entry on the front facade is a two-light, two-panel door in the sixth bay of the second story which historically accessed a porch.

The rear facade has doors in the second and fifth bays on the first floor. The double, wood, flush doors are topped by two-light transoms. Above the rear-facade doors are segmental arches composed of two courses of rowlocks topped by a row of headers.

- b. Windows: The east storefront has two large single-light fixed windows on either side of the door. Continuous glazing above the transom spans the wall above the door and windows. Divided into twelve lights with a letter in each, the name of the store, "CARTER'S WHSE," is spelled out.

The west storefront has two large display windows, each consisting of four fixed lights. Two fixed-light windows extend the display window along the canted walls. Clerestory windows span the entire area above the doors and display windows.

The second floor features five windows on the north facade; and six on the east facade, overlooking the two adjacent one-story buildings. These windows are two-over-two-light double-hung sash with green trim, segmental arches consisting of a double row of rowlocks topped by a projecting row of headers, and header lug sills.

The rear facade has four windows, two on each side of the west storefront entry and two on each side of the east storefront entry. These are two-over-two-light double-hung sash with header sills and segmental brick arches above, similar to those above the doors. The rear windows in the west store feature iron bars.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The flat, rectangular roof was severely altered when a fire gutted the second story. Historically it was higher, but after the fire an angled makeshift roof was erected over the burned portion of the building. The roof has stepped parapets along the east and front facades.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Eaves along the rear facade project 1' revealing plywood undersides.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The first floor is divided into two large, rectangular store areas with independent front entrances. Although historically both stores contained simple, unpartitioned spaces, the east store now has a small partitioned office area in front, and the west side has a kitchen and bathroom in the back, dating from its most recent use as a restaurant. A stairwell between the two commercial areas, also with a separate entrance to the street, accesses the second floor.
- b. Second floor: Historically the second floor had as many as eighteen rooms⁴. Now the entire east side, as well as the rooms along the south wall, are completely gutted. In the renovated section of the second floor, a hall runs from east to west in front of the gutted section, with three small rooms. Another hall runs along the west wall of the building, leading to the door in the sixth bay of the north facade, which led to a second-floor porch.

2. Stairways: A flight of twenty-seven wood risers runs south from the street level to the second floor. The original rounded banister is intact on the east side of the run.
3. Flooring: The east storefront has an outdoor entry area that has a concrete floor with decorative black-and-white tile, patterned with hexagons and frets which is continued in the front half of the store. The floor of the west store is concrete. The second floor is tongue-and-groove wood boards that are covered with linoleum tile.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The first-floor walls are plaster over brick; second-floor walls are lath and plaster. The first-floor ceilings are at least 14', covered with decorative pressed tin. Although the ceiling is original in the west portion, the east portion features a dropped acoustical-tile ceiling, although the original is visible in places. The ceilings in much of the second floor were burned. During renovation, a modern acoustical-tile ceiling was installed in the west section.
5. Openings:

⁴ Americus Daily Times Recorder, February 13, 1916.

- a. Doorways and doors: On the first-floor, hollow-core doors were installed as entrances to the partitioned areas in both stores. The second-floor doors are six-panel with rectangular lights above the transoms.
 - b. Windows: An interior window between the hall along the west wall and one of the rooms on the second floor is a one-over-one-light double-hung wood sash.
6. Decorative features and trim: An ornate fireplace with delicate turned posts supporting the mantel remains in the burned section of the former hospital. The second-floor doors and windows are ornamented with framing and corner blocks.
7. Mechanical equipment:
- a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: An air-conditioning and heating system was installed in the west store in 1976 when it became a restaurant. Historically the building was heated by fireplaces and wood- or coal-burning stoves.
 - b. Lighting: Fluorescent light fixtures are employed in the east store. The second floor has no built-in light fixtures.
 - c. Plumbing: A toilet and sink were installed in the west store when it became a restaurant. There is a full bath in the renovated section of the second floor.
- D. Site: This building faces north onto Main Street and is the third from the east in a row of eight buildings. Although it was constructed as one building, it was built on two lots and has been divided into two store areas.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: None have been located.
- B. Early Views:

A ca. 1925 photograph printed in Why Not the Best? (p. 32), shows the entire Main Street commercial block. The porch is visible on the second story of the A.C. Wellons Building.
- C. Interviews:

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, videotaped interview by Ed Bearss, National Park

Service, 1988, Plains, Georgia.

Frank Williams, current owner (west storefront), interview by Elizabeth Barthold, July 26, 1989, Plains, Georgia.

Ruth Godwin, Plains resident, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, July 26, 1989, Plains, Georgia.

Gloria Carter Spann, current owner (east storefront), interview by Elizabeth Barthold, August 23, 1989, Plains, Georgia.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Deed Books, Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Carter, Jimmy Why Not the Best?, Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1975.

Walters, Beth, History of Plains, Georgia 1885-1985, Americus, GA: Gammage Print Shop, 1985.

"Wellons Building Store at Plains," The Americus Daily Times Recorder, February 13, 1916.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Barthold
Project Historian
National Park Service
Summer 1989

ADDENDUM TO
WISE SANITARIUM NUMBER ONE
(A.C. WELLONS BUILDING)
Jimmy Carter National Site
Plains Historic District
Main Street, Between Bond and Hudson Streets
Plains
Sumter County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2216

HABS
GA,
131-PLAIN,
21-

XEROGRAPHIC COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013